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ABSTRACT

This study examined teacher selection practices of principals at five effective elementary schools, assessing whether or not differences existed in selection qualities, procedures, and problems relating to schools' socioeconomic status (SES), and community type. After identifying effective schools, the study conducted teacher and principal interviews about principals' selection processes. A survey was developed from interview data then completed by principals at four types of schools: metropolitan, middle-SES; metropolitan, low-SES; rural, middle-SES; and rural, low-SES. The survey asked about qualities principals sought when selecting teachers, procedures principals used to select teachers, and problems principals encountered during teacher selection. Results indicated there were several teacher qualities sought by principals regardless of school context. All types of schools mentioned the ability to establish relationships with parents and students, communication skills, teachers' continuing education, a love of teaching, going the extra mile, dedication, enthusiasm, and good teaching. Most types of schools mentioned academic background, qualifications, and extracurricular interests. Selection strategies used in all types of schools included teacher examination scores and grade point average, personnel files, interviews, and talking to past supervisors. Problems reported by all types of schools included other principals passing bad teachers, misleading interviews, shortage of black teachers, time constraints, and pressures from the central office to hire a specific person. (Contains 3 tables, and 27 references.) (SM)

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"Teacher Selection Practices in Effective Elementary Schools Which Differ in Community Type and Socioeconomic Status Context"

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Southwest Educational Research Association
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Statement of the Problem

There has been only a modest amount of research examining principals' behavior in teacher selection. While it has been insightful, it is less than uniform (Place & Kowalski, 1993). Research to date has not sufficiently addressed principals' actions during the teacher selection process. The current study investigated the teacher selection practices of principals at effective elementary schools. Its intent was to provide insight into the teacher qualities sought, procedures utilized, and problems encountered by principals during teacher selection.

There has been considerable attention in the literature to teacher qualities sought and to a lesser degree procedures utilized, but there has been very little attention given to problems associated with teacher selection. Further, there has been limited attention to selection issues in schools varying by socioeconomic (SES) and community type. A central part of this study was to assess whether or not there exist differences in selection qualities, procedures, and problems relating to SES and community type of a school.

Theoretical Framework

Instructional leadership and the school culture are the foundation for teacher selection in a school. The school culture is molded by and reflects the leaders' vision and goals (Owens, 1991; Ubben & Hughes, 1992). Teachers selected by the leader can positively or negatively affect the culture and academic mission of the school.

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Research on effective schools found strong instructional leaders who actively engaged in shaping the program (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Edmonds, 1979; Weber, 1971). Early research additionally found that these principals also focus on shaping the culture of the school as well as the professional and instructional structures of the organization (Burns, 1978; Duignan, 1986).

Later research on instructional leadership helped to specify some of the actions that principals engage in to foster school effectiveness (Murphy & Hallinger, 1985; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Peterson, 1982; Peterson, 1985). More recent research (Ubben & Hughes, 1992; Owens, 1991; Banner & Gagne, 1995) extends the findings that principal instructional leadership behavior includes cultural leadership. The cultural life of a school is shaped in part by the instructional leader and reflects a set of values, beliefs, and traditions that provide the foundation for school effectiveness (Ubben & Hughes, 1992; Owens, 1991; Banner & Gagne, 1995; Hoy & Miskel, 1991).

Principals can take many concrete steps to aid the development of an academic orientation and high achievement expectations, virtually all of which reflect their instructional leadership role (Davis & Thomas, 1989). One way principals can create an academic culture is to by selecting teachers needed for effective instruction, and using the teachers in accordance with academic priorities (Davis & Thomas, 1989). Effective school cultures are maintained by constant reinforcement of core values and beliefs, as

well as through the selection of people who fit in with the culture (Banner & Gagne, 1995). Research shows that teacher selection is one of the primary personnel tasks of effective schools (Cuban, 1984; Wynne, 1981; Frase, 1992; Haberman, 1993; Anderson, 1992; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), and effective principals select teachers who reinforce their goals and values, and will work best within that school's culture (Cuban, 1984).

Importance

Important research findings are that student performance in the classroom is the most direct link to student achievement, and that a teacher's behavior can affect student performance in ways that will lead to improved student achievement (Tymko, 1984). Teacher and classroom variables account for more of the variance in pupil achievement than school variables (Scheerens, Vermeulen, & Pelgrum, 1989). There is a need to learn more about principals' behaviors during teacher selection. The current study is based on the assumption that principals of effective schools intentionally shape the academic culture of those schools. One primary way of molding an effective school culture is by selecting teachers who share the principal's values and who will be effective in the classrooms and ultimately lead students to high achievement. Effective schools research and school reform efforts will be enhanced by discovering what principals of effective schools do to attain the best teachers possible.

Methods and Procedures

The present study was conducted in four phases. In Phase I, elementary schools were identified as 'effective' based on residual scores from regression analyses using the variables of percent free lunch and community type to predict achievement on standardized tests for two consecutive years. The resulting predicted mean scores were subtracted from the actual mean scores, yielding a residual score for each school. Twelve schools consisting of three metropolitan, middle-SES; three metropolitan, low-SES; three rural, middle-SES; and three rural, low-SES schools with +.70 or above the studentized residual mean were selected using stratified purposeful sampling. At least three classrooms of these initial sample of 12 schools representing different SES and community type contexts were observed and additionally screened for effectiveness with the Stallings (1980) Classroom Snapshot (SCS) and the Virgilio (1987) Teacher Behavior Inventory (VTBI).

The initial sample of 12 schools was reduced to 11 made up of two metropolitan, middle-SES; three metropolitan, low-SES; three rural, middle-SES; and three rural, low-SES schools, from observations of at least three classrooms utilizing the SCS and the VTBI. Frequency calculations which were converted to percentages for the SCS provided time-on-task and interactive teaching data. A school mean was calculated which ranged from .00 (0%) to 1.00 (100%). Results from the VTBI, which utilizes a six

point scale (1-poor, 2-below average, 3-average, 4-good/ above average, 5-excellent, 6-not applicable/ unable to observe), were calculated for each classroom followed by a school mean calculation. Scores on the VTBI, which measures classroom management, classroom instruction, and classroom climate, ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The final sample of 11 schools met the criteria of a total schools mean of at least 80% on the SCS (Virgilio, Teddlie, & Oescher, 1991), and a score of at least 3.50 on all three areas of the VTBI (Virgilio, Teddlie, & Oescher, 1991).

Phase II of the study entailed gathering qualitative data through principal and teacher interviews. To participate in the study, principals had to meet several criteria: a) have been at the school for a minimum of three consecutive years; b) have active involvement in teacher selection; c) have selected at least three teachers in the past three years; d) grant an interview with the researcher e) allow two of the most recently selected teachers to be interviewed by the researcher. A total of 11 principals, along with two of the most recently selected teachers of each of the four previously mentioned effective school types, were interviewed. The purpose of this phase was to investigate the teacher selection processes used by principals of effective elementary schools. In these qualitative case studies, the school was the unit of analysis.

Phase III involved the development and piloting of a survey instrument based on the data gleaned from the interviews in Phase II. First, content analysis (Patton, 1990) of the

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interview data was completed. Then an item pool was developed. In step three, both face and initial content validity were established by a panel of experts representing principals, university professors, and central office personnel from both metropolitan and rural districts. Panel members modified and eliminated items in the survey pool. The next step, step four, involved pilot testing the survey with a sample of 21 principals of effective elementary schools. The pilot test sample was comprised of principals of five metropolitan, middle-SES, six metropolitan, low-SES, five rural, middle-SES, and five rural, low-SES schools. Nineteen of the 21 (90%) principals completed the pilot surveys. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine reliability coefficients. These coefficients were: a) .76 on the *qualities* section; b) .82 on the *procedures* section; c) .78 on the *problems* section; and d) .73 on the *total* survey.

Phase IV utilized the survey developed in Phase III to collect quantitative data in the aforementioned four school types. A total of 127 principals of effective as well as typical schools participated in the survey. A response rate of 83% (106 surveys) was obtained. Factor analysis to determine construct validity, as well as internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha, is presently being conducted. Analysis of variance will be used to determine whether school types differ significantly on variables. The Dunn method will be used to discover where any differences occur. Further, item by item analyses will be done to discover if and how teacher selection practices differ between school types.

Data gathered via quantitative analyses will be used to answer several research questions.

1. What qualities do principals look for when selecting teachers?

    1a. Do the qualities sought differ by school type (effective/ typical)?

    1b. Do the qualities sought differ by socioeconomic status (low/ middle)?

    1c. Do the qualities sought differ by community type (metropolitan/ rural)?

2. What procedures do principals utilize to select teachers?

    2a. Do the procedures differ by school type (effective/ typical)?

    2b. Do the procedures differ by socioeconomic status (low/ middle)?

    2c. Do the procedures differ by community type (metropolitan/ rural)?

3. What problems do principals encounter during teacher selection?

    3a. Do the problems differ by school type (effective/ typical)?

    3b. Do the problems differ by socioeconomic status (low/ middle)?

    3c. Do the problems differ by community type (metropolitan/ rural)?

Results and Conclusions

The qualitative data analyses yielded conclusions that there are several teacher qualities sought regardless of school context. There are also qualities sought in one context that are not sought in another. To be represented on the table, each quality had to be mentioned as important in at least two schools during the interviews. (Table 1)

Table 1 **Qualities**

	MM	ML	RM	RL
1. academic background/ good student	I	III	0	II
2. relationships with students & parents	II	III	III	III
3. communication skills	I	II	II	II
4. continues own education	I	II	III	III
5. delayed entrant/ mother	I	III	III	III
6. dedicated/ determined/ tenacious	II	II	III	II
7. enthusiastic/ energetic	II	II	II	III
8. discipline/ classroom management	II	III	III	III
9. high expectations/ all kids can learn	0	I	0	I
10. knowledge base	I	II	II	II
11. motivates students	II	I	II	III
12. *loves* children	II	III	I	III
13. a role model	I	0	0	II
14. shares ideas/ resources	I	I	I	II
15. stable (low turnover)	I	0	II	III
16. good teaching: creative/ meets students' needs	II	III	III	III
17. "goes the extra mile"	II	III	III	III
18. teaching background/ experiences	II	III	II	I
19. certified/ qualified	I	II	0	II
20. really wants & loves to teach	I	II	III	III
21. "fits in"	II	III	II	II
22. friendly/ sociable/ gets along with others	I	III	III	II
23. economic status	0	I	0	I
24. marital status	0	I	0	I
25. has "roots"/ vested interest	0	0	II	II
26. an asset/ adds something/ "new blood"	I	II	I	I
27. has extracurricular interests	I	II	0	I
28. religious/ moral character	I	I	I	I

Sample: 11

Key: MM = Metropolitan, Middle SES
ML = Metropolitan, Low SES
RM = Rural, Middle SES
RL = Rural, Low SES

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The academic background of a teacher was mentioned as important in one metropolitan, middle-SES (MM); three metropolitan, low-SES (ML); two rural, low-SES (RL); and none of the rural, middle-SES (RM) schools. This does not mean necessarily that a teacher's academic background is not important in a RM setting, but that it was not mentioned in the interviews.

The ability of a teacher to establish relationships with students and also parents was mentioned in every school. The importance of a teacher's communication skills as well as a teacher's own continuing education was discussed in every school context. Of special note, in all but one school, it was stated that the principal sought female teachers who were delayed entrants (someone who comes into the teaching profession later in life after another career possibly), and women who have children of their own. The principals felt these teachers really want to teach, and that they usually have empathy and patience with children.

Dedication and enthusiasm were two teacher qualities sought by principals in every context. And the ability to discipline students and use good classroom management techniques were stated to be important in every school. Interestingly, high expectations and the belief that all children can learn were mentioned only in low-SES schools.

A teacher's knowledge base as well as the ability to motivate students was mentioned in every context. Also, a teacher who *loves* children was important in every context.

A teacher who will be a good role model for students was mentioned in one MM and two RL schools. A teacher who will share their ideas and resources was stated to be important in every school context. Surprisingly, a teacher who is likely to be stable (remain at the school), was mentioned in every school context except the metropolitan, low-SES schools, which is where teacher turnover rates are usually the highest.

A teacher who uses good teaching strategies such as being creative and meeting students' needs was stated to be important in every school. Also, a teacher who "goes the extra mile" by working long hours in planning before and after school, making home visits, creating innovative teaching props, etc., was sought by every school principal. A teacher's teaching background and experiences were of importance in every context.

A teacher who is certified and qualified to fill the teaching position was mentioned in all but the RM schools. And a teacher who really wants to teach and loves to teach was stated to be important in every school context. A teacher who "fits in" as well as one who is friendly and gets along well with others were also mentioned as being important in every context.

An interesting finding was that in two of the low-SES schools, the principals felt a teacher's economic status and marital status were important qualities. They stated that they wanted someone who understood their students' backgrounds, and they didn't want to select a teacher who was having marital problems at home.

The principals in rural contexts were more likely to seek teachers who have "roots" in their community and who have a vested interest in seeing the children do well in school. Whereas the principals in metropolitan contexts were more likely to state that they wanted a teacher who would add something different or be a new asset in their schools.

A teacher who has extracurricular interests outside of teaching was stated to be important in every context except the RM context. And a teachers religious beliefs and moral character were mentioned as an important quality in every school context.

It is true that some of the qualities mentioned as important are those a principal may not observe before selecting a teacher. For this reason, the principals discussed various selection strategies utilized to determine whether or not a teacher candidate possesses the qualities they are seeking. Next, teacher selection procedures will be highlighted. Again, at least two schools had to mention using a particular procedure for it to be reflected in the data presentation. (Table 2)

NTE scores along with GPAs and transcripts were used by principals in every context. Also, when available, principals in every school context investigated a teacher's personnel file to peruse his/her evaluations, employment record, and past observations.

Principals in every context except the RM stated they used recommendations. Also, principals in metropolitan settings stated a specific interest in recommendations from supervisor(s), principal(s), and peer teacher(s).

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Table 2 **Procedures**

	MM	ML	RM	RL
A. Background				
1. NTE scores	I	II	I	I
2. GPA/ transcripts	I	I	II	III
3. personnel file (evaluations, employment record, observations)	II	II	II	I
4. recommendations	II	III	0	II
supervisors	I	II	0	0
principal(s)	I	II	0	0
peer teachers	I	I	0	0
5. certification/ qualifications	0	II	I	II
6. resume/ application	I	0	I	II
7. criminal background check	0	I	0	I
B. Student teachers	0	I	II	II
C. Telephone calls				
1. supervising teacher	I	I	II	I
2. professors (beginning teachers)	0	II	0	0
3. principal(s)	II	III	II	III
D. Observations				
1. teacher observes at my school	I	I	0	I
2. I observe at teacher's school	II	0	0	0
E. Contacted about vacancies				
1. transfers	I	I	I	I
2. central office	I	III	II	II
3. present faculty	I	I	I	I
F. Offer of position	0	I	0	I
G. Interview				
1. tell about position & students	I	II	I	II
2. show teacher around my school	II	I	0	0
3. ask "Can you do this job?"	0	I	0	I
4. discuss discipline	I	I	I	I
5. discuss teaching experiences	I	III	I	I
6. ask about teaching strategies	I	I	I	I
7. ask teacher's philosophy on teaching	0	I	0	III
8. take notes/ rank	0	II	0	0
9. notice demeanor	0	II	0	II
10. interview more than once	I	III	0	0
11. relaxed talk (no standard interview guide)	I	II	I	III
12. interview may last 2 to 3 hours	II	I	0	I
13. get a "gut feeling"	0	I	I	II
14. use a committee	I	I	II	I
15. principal makes final decision	0	I	0	I
16. ask about teacher's personal life	I	I	0	0

Table 2 (Cont'd) **Procedures**

	MM	ML	RM	RL
G. Interview				
17. look at their portfolio	I	0	0	I
18. ask if s/he has any questions	I	0	0	II
19. ask what position s/he prefers	I	0	0	I
20. ask why s/he went into teaching	0	0	I	II
21. ask about career goals	0	0	I	I
22. ask situational questions	0	0	I	II

Sample: 11

Key: MM = Metropolitan, Middle SES
ML = Metropolitan, Low SES
RM = Rural, Middle SES
RL = Rural, Low SES

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Principals in all but MM settings mentioned checking a teacher's certification(s) and qualifications. And principals in all but ML schools stated utilizing a resume and application form during teacher selection. Interestingly, a principal in both low-SES contexts admitted to conducting their own criminal background investigation of teacher candidates.

All principals except those in MM settings stated that they carefully observe student teachers in their schools. This may actually be a form of recruitment, but the principals declared that they were more likely to select someone who had successfully completed a student teaching experience in their school than a candidate who had not.

Judicious use of the telephone was advocated by principals in every context. At least one principal in every context was especially interested in talking to a candidate's past supervisor(s). Two principals in the ML schools were most interested in talking to past professors of beginning teachers. And every principal except one stated that they always call a candidate's past principal(s).

Observations were reported as important selection techniques except in RM settings. Principals were likely to have a teacher observe at their school, but two principals in MM settings reported observing candidates at their present school also.

Principals in every context stated that they were contacted about vacancies by teachers wanting to transfer within their school district. Principals were most often

contacted by central office personnel regarding candidates for vacancies. Also, principals in every context maintained that present faculty members informed them of teachers who they believe would successfully fill a teaching vacancy. And two principals in low-SES schools discussed the importance of offering a position either on the spot or the next day. This, they stated, was to keep their first choice from getting away.

The interview was a very important procedure used in all the schools. Principals in every context reported telling a candidate specifically about the position and the students. And principals in metropolitan settings were likely to show a candidate around their school. A principal in both low-SES schools said they ask the candidate very directly, "Can you do this job?" And in all school contexts, principals asked candidates to discuss discipline, their teaching experiences, and also their teaching strategies. Also, principals in low-SES contexts reported asking candidates to discuss their philosophy of teaching.

Principals in ML settings said they take notes and rank candidates as they interview. These principals in ML settings, along with their counterparts in RL schools, also take notice of a candidate's demeanor during the interview.

Principals in metropolitan settings emphasized the importance of interviewing a candidate more than once, and principals in every context reported using a relaxed talk rather than a standardized interview. Principals in all contexts except the RM said their

interviews may last several hours, or "the better part of the afternoon". And principals in all contexts except the MM setting said they just "get a gut feeling" about a teacher.

A principal in every context reported using a committee during the selection process, but principals in low-SES schools were more likely to make the final decision alone. And principals in metropolitan settings reportedly ask candidates about their personal lives.

Principals in MM and RL settings stated that they ask to see a candidate's portfolio. Principals in these same settings also reported that they ask a candidate what questions s/he might have, and also ask what position s/he prefers.

Principals in rural contexts stated that during interviews they ask a candidate about their career goals. These same principals also utilize situational questions.

The next area of inquiry to be discussed is that of problems encountered during the teacher selection process. Table 3 outlines the responses obtained during the qualitative data gathering portion of this research project. Note that in order for a problem to be included in Table 3, at least two schools had to report the same problem.

Five problems reported in all school contexts were that other principals try to "pass bad teachers", interviews can be misleading, there is a shortage of black teachers, there are time constraints that influence teacher selection procedures, and on occasion there may be pressure from central office to take a teacher a principal otherwise would not choose.

Table 3 **Problems**

	MM	ML	RM	RL
1. other principals "passing bad teachers"	I	II	I	II
2. misleading interviews	II	III	I	I
3. shortage of black teachers	I	I	I	I
4. time constraints	III	II	I	I
5. pressure from central office to take a teacher	I	I	I	I
6. 1st year teachers (state assessment paperwork)	I	II	0	0
7. fear of making a mistake	III	III	0	0
8. central office politics	I	II	0	0
9. too many applicants	I	I	0	0
10. too few applicants	0	0	II	I
11. shortage of male teachers	0	0	II	I
12. location of school	0	0	I	II
13. relying on a student teaching experience	0	I	I	0
14. shortage of special education teachers	0	I	II	0
15. recommendations based on friendship	I	0	0	I
16. requirement to select based on race	II	0	0	I
17. timing of vacancies	I	0	0	I
18. teachers who just want *a job*	II	0	0	I

Sample: 11

Key: MM = Metropolitan, Middle SES
ML = Metropolitan, Low SES
RM = Rural, Middle SES
RL = Rural, Low SES

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There were four teacher selection problems reported in metropolitan settings, but not in rural settings. First was the paperwork required for the state assessment associated with selecting a beginning teacher. Next, every principal in a metropolitan setting stated having a real fear of making a mistake, and having to work very hard not to be hindered by this fear during the selection process. Third, central office politics is reportedly a problem in metropolitan schools, as well as having too many applicants.

There were three problems reported by principals in rural settings, but not in metropolitan settings. First, there are too few applicants. Second, the location of their schools. Principals of rural schools stated that many good candidates simply will not move or travel to an oftentimes isolated area to teach. Also, these principals specifically pointed out that there is a shortage male teachers.

Two problems reported only in a ML and a RM setting were relying on a candidate's student teaching experience as an indication of how a candidate will actually teach with their own classroom. Also, a shortage of special education teachers was reported in these aforementioned settings.

Three problems were stated by principals in MM and RL settings. First, they had been required to select a teacher based on race. Second, the timing of vacancies has been a problem for them in the past. And last, they had a problem of teachers applying for a position not because they want to teach, but because they just want a job.

In addition, the researcher noted some variables gleaned from the school site visits and principal and teacher interviews which confirm and extend the effective schools research. First, principals in every context said they provide a good working situation for their teachers. This helps them establish a good reputation for themselves and their school. They saw teacher selection as a means of "natural selection" where the *best* teachers always want to teach at the *best* schools. One of the ways these principals stated they establish a good reputation is by having a faculty that establishes good relationships with parents. They follow this recipe by supporting their teachers. They stated that this keeps teacher morale high and keeps teachers motivated. The principals said they level high expectations on their teachers, but also help their teachers solve problems and acquire desired teaching materials and resources.

Further, principals in every context said they consciously maintain a friendly atmosphere in their school. Also, they recognize and encourage teachers who help each other solve problems and share materials.

Additional information will hopefully be gained through the principal surveys, which are a component of the fourth and final phase of the current study. At this writing, the quantitative analyses are incomplete.

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